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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002511

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SUBJECT: IRAQI MINISTER OF DEFENSE: NEXT STOP, NINEWA

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Classified By: Pol-Mil Minister Counselor Marcie B. Ries for reasons 1.
4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: POL-MIL Minister-Counselor and her incoming successor met with Iraq Minister of Defense (MoD) Abdul Qadr August 6 to discuss security developments in Iraq. Citing with approval the current operation in Diyala, MoD said his plan was to next turn to Ninewa "to clean it out." He said that Syria is threatened by and opposed to democracy in Iraq and that Iran and Turkey use the presence of the MEK, PKK and PJAK terrorist groups in Iraq as an excuse to violate Iraq's borders. He stated that Iraqi forces are ready to accept the transfer of security for the MEK camp at Ashraf. While conceding more could be done now, Abdul Qadr said it would likely be 2010 before Iraq was able to deploy military force against the PKK. END SUMMARY.

THE IMPROVING FACE OF SECURITY IN IRAQ

¶2. (C) At an August 6 meeting with POL-MIL Minister Counselor and her incoming successor, Minister of Defense Abdul Qadr said that the security situation in Iraq was improved drastically from that of six months earlier. Citing the high level of cooperation with Coalition Forces (CF) and, particularly U.S. Forces, MoD said the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) were now "working much better."

¶3. (C) Asked what the MOD next hoped to accomplish after the (thus far) successful operations now underway in Diyala, MoD answered without hesitation that his "dream" was to do the same in Ninewa Province. "We are planning to clear out the bad elements and the terrorists in Ninewa," he said, adding that reconnaissance had already begun and the planning for an operational phase there was already underway. He envisaged the operation starting at the beginning of 2009. "In 2009, we want real improvements in security," he stated. The MoD said while the GOI needed to concentrate more on border security. Previously, the GOI took steps to counter weapons being brought across the border. "Now it is more a problem of people crossing over, and we are interested in how they are providing supplies to these terrorists," he concluded.

RELATIONS WITH SYRIA

¶4. (C) Asked whether the GOI had seen changes in the last several months in the way the Iranians were behaving towards the GOI, the MoD demurred. "I cannot say they have changed their way of doing things with us," he said, but noted the

flow of weapons from Iran was more restricted now than it had been previously. He told of weapons and people (presumably Special Groups) coming into Iraq through Basrah and Amarah, but said their freedom of movement was restricted because of Iraqi forces in those areas. The MoD stated that not a day passed without arrests or weapon seizures, telling us, "we are no longer waiting for incidents to occur - we are now the initiator." According to the MoD, this explained why both Syrian and Iranian activities were much more limited now.

¶ 15. (C) The MoD reserved his sharpest criticism for Syria, asserting that the Syrians oppose democracy in Iraq and feel threatened by it while permitting Baathists to move around freely. In Ninewa, the MoD said, anti-government forces receive support from Syria. "We are suffering badly there," he said. The MoD said the GOI had lots of conversations with the Syrians, and "since 2004, they have never lived up to their promises."

MEK

¶ 16. (C) On the subject of the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK) presence in Iraq, the MoD said the GOI was working to coordinate protection of the MEK camp and surrounding area with CF, deploying a battalion to carry out the mission. It fell to the Ministry of Interior, he said, to restrict MEK members' movements and their meetings. "I know the MEK well. They are highly educated, well trained and can be extremely dangerous - especially in training others," the MoD said. The MEK needed to understand and respect the fact that they were on Iraqi soil and that they must conform their actions to the will of the Iraqi government. He said that the GOI

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was not willing to have a group "work against a neighboring country."

¶ 17. (C) The Minister continued that MEK members have the right to go back to Iran or to some other country. The MoD drew comparisons to the PKK and PJAK organizations, calling the subject of foreign terror groups in Iraq a "real problem for the Iraqi government." "With all three of these groups, we should cut their wings and tell them how they should act with our neighbors," he said, thereby removing the need for neighboring countries to cross Iraq's borders to strike the groups.

PKK AND RELATIONS WITH TURKEY

¶ 18. (C) In response to MinsCouns' query about PKK, the Minister said he thought more could and should be done to block PKK supply routes. He said that it would likely be 2010 before the GOI would be able to take strong military steps to finally eliminate the PKK. "We need to fight all the militants here, before we go up north." The MoD saw the presence of MEK, PKK and PJAK as providing ongoing excuses for both Turkey and Iran to keep striking Iraq's borders. He claimed that Turkish bombers were conducting sorties in Iraq, turning around in Iran and flying back to Turkey and said that Iraq needed to limit the Turkish Air Force in its efforts against the PKK inside Iraq. As for the Iranians, they knew that the Americans would shoot down any Iranian aircraft violating Iraqi airspace so relied on Turkish aircraft to maintain pressure on PJAK.

¶ 19. (C) The Minister said, nevertheless, that relations between Iraq and Turkey were excellent"- especially as the Turks see Iraq taking steps against the PKK. He was optimistic for the prospects of increased Turkish training for the Iraqi forces. However, the MoD said, at present there is no real border between Iraq and Turkey, citing the paucity of border posts and the need to establish new ones.

He said he would be very willing to have Turkish companies
work on the necessary construction.

CROCKER